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Introduction

The *Istikhara* is an Islamic tradition which is strongly rooted in the culture of the Shi'a especially those of Iran, India and Pakistan. Unfortunately however, it has been noticed that most people have an incorrect view of the *Istikhara* and the usage of it. When an important issue comes up in their lives, without delay and pausing to stop and think and ask others for advice, they will seek guidance from the Unseen One and perform the traditional *Istikhara*. The person, without following the specific conditions and etiquette, will, without delay, reach for the Qur'an or a Tasbeeh and...

A group of these people, without even thinking about the outcome of the *Istikhara*, will, if they understand the result as being in favor of what they really want to do and what they think is their best interest will act upon it. If it comes out 'negative', they will still act upon it to try to get what they desire.

Yet another group of people, who think that the outcome of the *Istikhara* is like the Qur'an meaning that it is a revelation from Allah take the outcome of it as being obligatory to accept and place their lives and destiny in the result of the *Istikhara*.

Both of these groups have definitely not understood the true meaning of the *Istikhara* and the proper usage of it, since not paying attention to the first step, that is using one's reason and intellect and then resorting to asking others for advice plays a very important role and has a great effect on the actual outcome of the *Istikhara*.

The first group of people, who due to confusion in their own minds in regards to the *Istikhara* and performing it without delay, have unwittingly, fallen into a great sin of weakening the Glorious Qur'an, and of disrespecting the Noble Scripture. They have chosen their own destiny which is controlled by their own lusts and what is in their 'best interests' and even some, without performing the *Istikhara*, fall victim to this.

The sins of the second group of people are no less than those of the first group; since without any kind of proof – either from common sense or from the religion, have made it incumbent on themselves to follow the *Istikhara*, whose original purpose is to remove doubt and make one's heart at ease.

If a person is able to reach to this state by better methods such as thinking and asking others for advice, then it is not necessary for him to seek refuge with the *Istikhara*; leave aside what would happen to the one who acted upon the outcome of the *Istikhara* which has been performed out of confusion and ignorance and by not following the prescribed conditions and prerequisites.

The result of having such an outlook in regards to the *Istikhara* is that the person does not use his brain in day to day life and ends up unsuccessful in the twists and turns that life takes him through. Because of this, he loses the real rewards of this world that come from using one's intelligence and seeking advice from others.

Various types of Istikhara and the proper method of use

1) *Istikhara* by Supplication: The actual meaning of '*Istikhara*' is "*asking what is best and proper from Allah, the Merciful*" which in itself is a form of supplication. Reliance (upon Allah), leaving all of one's affairs (to Allah) and having a good or favorable opinion of Allah are the requirements before one performs any supplication. This means that in all of one's affairs, the person supplicates to Allah and sincerely, asks Him to make his path easy and to have a good outcome.

The *Istikhara* by supplication in all instances takes precedence. It has been recommended that before one performs even the smallest act, he start off by supplicating to Allah . In the ahadith, it has been emphasized that this type of *Istikhara* should be performed before every action, and is one of the reasons for the success of a person, since in reality, the *Istikhara* by supplication includes:

- **Praising and Glorifying Allah** coupled with modesty and humility towards Him; and asking one's needs and requests from the One who is completely needless. Having good thoughts about Allah and that He only prefers and accepts that which is good for His servants. However, the most important thing is that one will have peace of mind and a sound heart when performing any action.

2) *Istikhara* by Seeking Advice from Others: When a person needs to find what is truly the best for him, he asks advice from the believers who are capable of providing this advice to him. However, this must be performed after supplicating and asking Allah for the best and asking Him to guide him where prosperity lies. He too only wishes what is truly the best and only He knows what is good and bad and is able to have His answer come from the mouth of His servants.

During one's lifetime, every knowledgeable person, especially during times when he needs to make a very important decision regarding his life, should not simply rely on his limited and restricted knowledge and intellect. In addition to his own brain, he is also in need of asking other for advice and see what others have to say since according to Imam 'Ali ('as), it is incumbent upon a person of intellect to develop and mature in his own intellect by way of other intelligent people and from the deep knowledge and insight of others.

He, peace be upon him, has said:

حَقُّ عَلَى الْعَاقِلِ أَنْ يَضِيفَ إِلَى رَأْيِهِ رَأْيَ الْعُقَلَاءِ وَيَضُمُّ إِلَى عِلْمِهِ عُلُومَ الْحُكَمَاءِ.

`It is incumbent on the person of intellect that he humble himself to the views and intelligence of the intellectuals and that he combine his knowledge with the knowledge of the wise people. " [12](#)

Seeking advice from the believers who have the ability to offer advice is one of the best ways to seek help and to add insight to one's thoughts. Before one proceeds with this form of seeking the best, he should perform the supplications and ask Allah for the best and then seek advice from others so that these supplications will give a better outcome to asking others for advice. It is through the supplications and the specific favours of Allah that the advice is given from others and guides one to what is truly the best for him.

Next Stage: If a person makes the intention to perform a certain task, and even after supplicating and asking the best (from Allah), and using his own intelligence, and through thought, research and asking others for advice is still not able to reach to a conclusion and still entertains doubt and uncertainty in his heart, then the best thing to do is to once again return to Allah – the real transform of hearts and ask for 'content of the heart' and for help to remove all doubts and confusion. This can be accomplished by a variety of methods of *Istikhara* including the 'spiritual *Istikhara*', or by use of the *Qur'an*, *Tasbih* or by *papers*'.

3) The 'Spiritual' *Istikhara*: This type of *Istikhara* is also a type of mystical relationship with Allah . It is performed in this way that after asking others for advice, and after one's intellect has not produced any results, one performs the supplication to Allah for seeking the best. While in the presence of His Creator who is free from all need and want, asks one's needs and what is distressing him and asks Him to guide to what is truly the best.

At this time, the person will look deep in his heart, and through soul searching, would see which path to follow is stronger in his soul. This will be the answer to his *Istikhara*, and with certainty and satisfaction, would go ahead with one's plans.

4) The *Istikhara* by *Qur'an*: If after a person has performed the supplication for seeking the best, and after thinking and asking others for advice still does not have peace of mind, then one is permitted to refer to the *Qur'an* in order to remove the doubts and through this method, seek the best [23](#)

5) The *Istikhara* by *Tasbih*: If after one has supplicated to Allah and after exhausted his thinking and asking others for advice, one is still in a state of confusion, then this method is used. The procedure for this *Istikhara* with the *Tasbih* has been described in hadith number 34 in this book.

6) The *Istikhara* by *Papers*': This is the final type of *Istikhara* mentioned in this book that is performed

by using six pieces of paper and as commonly known as *Dhat al-Riqā`*. Even though this form of *Istikhara* is hardly known or practiced among the common people, it has a special place amongst a select group of `Ulama.³

^{1.} Ghurur al-Hikm, 4920

^{2.} Refer to Hadith 30 to 33 for this method

^{3.} See Hadith number 35 for this method.

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